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Pope Honors Rupert Murdoch, Roy Disney, Bob Hope

Religion: The three, who are not Catholic, are among 67 honorees in the L.A. area. The knighthood awards cite character and aid to society, church.

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Pope John Paul II has awarded papal knighthood to comedian Bob Hope, news magnate Rupert Murdoch and entertainment executive Roy Disney--all non-Catholics--along with 64 prominent Los Angeles-area Catholics.

Among the Catholics named were actor Ricardo Montalban, longtime Los Angeles City Councilman John Ferraro and hotel executive Barron Hilton.

Cardinal Roger M. Mahony will induct the men and women into the Pontifical Order of St. Gregory the Great in a ceremony Jan. 11 at St. Francis de Sales Church in Sherman Oaks.

The pope bestows the titles on people of "unblemished character," including non-Catholics, who have "promoted the interests of society, the [Catholic] Church and the Holy See [Vatican]," said Father Gregory Coiro, spokesman for the Los Angeles Catholic Archdiocese.

Hope, Murdoch and Disney all have Catholic wives, who were named Dames of St. Gregory, the female equivalent of a knighthood.

All have contributed heavily to church institutions, though no figures were made public. Bob and Dolores Hope, for instance, have donated to the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception in Washington, Coiro said.

Roy Disney, who heads the animation division of Walt Disney Co., and his wife, Patricia, are supporters of the church's plans for a new cathedral in Los Angeles. Murdoch, who has agreed to purchase the Los Angeles Dodgers, and his wife, Anna, have supported the Archdiocesan Education Foundation and other Catholic causes, according to Coiro.

"I was quite surprised," said Ferraro, a longtime member of St. Brendan Parish, near Hancock Park, who was unaware that Mahony had submitted his name to the pope. "It's certainly not deserved, even shocking that a City Council member would be honored."

The titles are strictly honorary. They entail neither duties nor ceremonial uniforms.

"Does it mean they get a higher place in heaven?" said Msgr. Francis J. Weber, the archdiocese's historian based at San Fernando Mission. "I don't know, probably not."

In addition to big donors and celebrities, the titles of Knight Commander or Dame of St. Gregory are being given to Catholics who have donated time and talent to church work among Korean, Filipino, Vietnamese, African American and other ethnic communities.

The only ordained recipient is Aloysius Caffrey, 77, a longtime deacon who headed the CIA office in Los Angeles before retiring.

"He's on the road constantly to deliver donated food to AIDS hospices and needy organizations," said Msgr. William Leser, pastor at St. Jude Parish in Westlake Village. Another honoree in that parish is Geraldine Frawley, publisher of the National Catholic Register and Twin Circle Catholic newspapers until they were sold two years ago.

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"Cardinal Mahony is very aware of the contributions to church work that people make and tries to acknowledge that in many ways," Weber said. In addition to his annual Cardinal's Awards and other tributes to the laity, "whenever he goes to say Mass, if there are altar boys and girls, he gives them each keepsake medals," Weber said.

Mahony was on vacation this week and the archdiocesan headquarters was closed for the holidays.

The 67 new knighthoods represent a sudden increase in the rate of awards for Los Angeles-area Catholics. Since 1921, when Joseph Scott, a prominent civic and political figure of that period, became the first Los Angeles resident so honored, only 142 knighthoods had been granted locally, an average of fewer than two per year.

It was Mahony who petitioned the pope to admit women to the order for the first time, and in 1994 he nominated 10 local women who became the first dames, according to Weber.

With more than 3.6 million Catholics, "Los Angeles is the largest archdiocese in the United States and has many contributors to the church," said Weber when asked to suggest reasons for the favorable papal responses to Los Angeles nominees.

William Close, who attends a La Canada Flintridge parish, "is financial chairman for the new cathedral project, and in that volunteer role is spending virtually full time on the project," said Weber.

Close and five other Catholic men on the list were already members of the order, but they are being given an ecclesiastical promotion of sorts, to "knight commander with star."

Others with that higher rank will include Bob Hope; Wilfred Von der Ahe, of a North Hollywood parish, one of the founders of

Vons supermarkets; and Cyril C. Nigg, a Beverly Hills philanthropist. Nigg's wife, Josephine Wayne Nigg, first wife of actor John Wayne, will also enter the order Jan. 11.

Mahony will induct the large group during an afternoon Mass at the Sherman Oaks parish with a dinner following at the Sheraton Universal Hotel.

The 67 men and women named knights and dames of St. Gregory the Great by Pope John Paul II, with their home parishes:

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Knight Commanders of St. Gregory With Star--William Close (St. Bede the Venerable Parish, La Canada Flintridge); Bob Hope (non-Catholic); Cyril C. Nigg (Good Shepherd, Beverly Hills); Kenneth Olsen (Cathedral Chapel, Los Angeles); John Shea (St. Philip the Apostle, Pasadena); the late L. Owen Traynor (Good Shepherd, Beverly Hills); Wilfred Von der Ahe (St. Charles Borromeo, North Hollywood).

Dames of St. Gregory With Star--Dolores Hope (St. Charles Borromeo, North Hollywood); Mary Jane Von der Ahe (St. Charles Borromeo, North Hollywood).

Knight Commanders of St. Gregory--John Balaoing (St. Brendan, Los Angeles); Bernardas Brazdzionis (St. Casimir, Los Angeles); Deacon Aloysius Caffrey (St. Jude**, Westlake Village);** Louis Castruccio (St. Paul the Apostle, Los Angeles); Albert Centofante (St. Lawrence Martyr, Redondo Beach); Joon Ho Chuong (St. Basil, Los Angeles); Roy Disney

(non-Catholic); Peter Dwan (Corpus Christi, Pacific Palisades); John Ferraro (St. Brendan, Los Angeles); Stafford Grady (St. Bede the Venerable, La Canada Flintridge); Thomas Grojean (St. Monica, Santa Monica); Barron Hilton (Good Shepherd, Beverly Hills); Paul Hughes (St. Robert Bellarmine, Burbank); Edward Illig (St. Bede the Venerable, La Canada Flintridge); Joseph Kennerson (St. Joseph, Long Beach); James Kenney (Good Shepherd, Beverly Hills); Edward Landry (Our Lady of Lourdes, Northridge); Edwin Marzec (St. Monica, Santa Monica); John McNicholas (Cathedral Chapel, Los Angeles); Ricardo Montalban (Good Shepherd, Beverly Hills); John Morehart (Our Lady of Mt. Carmel, Montecito); Rupert Murdoch (non-Catholic); Lanh Van Nguyen (Our Lady of Loretto, Los Angeles); Andrew Chung-Woo Nam (Our Mother of Good Counsel, Los Angeles); Gary W. Phillips (St. Paul the Apostle, Los Angeles); Cornelius Pings (St. Andrew, Pasadena); Eugene St. John (Our Lady of Mt. Carmel, Montecito); Charles Smith (St. Monica, Santa Monica); Frank Smith (St. Louis de Marillac, Covina); Michael Smith (St. Bede the Venerable, La Canada Flintridge); George Takahashi (St. Francis Xavier Maryknoll Chapel, Los Angeles); Charles Von der Ahe (St. Charles Borromeo, North Hollywood); Thomas Von der Ahe (St. Charles Borromeo, North Hollywood); Thomas Wathen (St. Martin of Tours, Los Angeles).

Dames of St. Gregory--Catherine Boeddeker (Old Mission Santa Barbara, Santa Barbara); Mary Centofante (St. Lawrence Martyr, Redondo Beach); Helen Close (St. Bede the Venerable, La Canada Flintridge); Mary Pat Cooper (St. Paul the Apostle, Los Angeles); Patricia Disney (St. Charles Borromeo, North Hollywood); Mary Dohn (Good Shepherd, Beverly Hills);

Peggy Ferry (St. Bede the Venerable, La Canada Flintridge); Geraldine Frawley (St. Jude, Westlake Village); Alicia Gavin (St. Brendan, Los Angeles); Gloria Griffin (Our Lady of Lourdes, Northridge); Marcia Hayden (St. Philip the Apostle, Pasadena); Marilyn Hilton (Good Shepherd, Beverly Hills); Susana Huston (St. Bede the Venerable, La Canada Flintridge); Francine Laband (Sacred Heart, Covina); Jean Zimmerman Lawrence (St. Frances X. Cabrini, Los Angeles); Anna Murdoch (Good Shepherd, Beverly Hills); Geraldine Nigg (Cathedral Chapel, Los Angeles); Josephine Wayne Nigg (Good Shepherd, Beverly Hills); Bernadette Nishimura (St. Francis Xavier Maryknoll Chapel, Los Angeles); Edith Piczek (Our Lady of Loretto, Los Angeles); Isabel Piczek (Our Lady of Loretto, Los Angeles); Dorothy Shea (St. Philip the Apostle, Pasadena); Joanne Smith (St. Bede the Venerable, La Canada Flintridge); Nancye Traynor (Good Shepherd, Beverly Hills).

New Knights of St. Gregory

Among the 67 men and women being inducted into the Pontifical Order of St. Gregory the Great are comedian Bob Hope, entertainment executive Roy Disney and news magnet Rupert Murdoch.